**IN THE CLAIMS**

1.    (Currently Amended)  A method <u>to be performed on a computing device</u> for providing improved assignment of product orders to <u>one or more</u> ~~multiple~~ fulfillers, the method comprising:

receiving an order that requires fulfillment from one or more fulfillers, said order comprising individual order items;

ranking said <u>one or more</u> ~~set of~~ fulfillers from most favorable to least favorable, based on specified criteria;

if all order items of the order can be fulfilled by a single fulfiller, assigning fulfillment of the entire order to the most-favorable fulfiller that can fulfill all order items; otherwise

splitting the order by assigning fulfillment of individual order items to the most-favorable fulfillers that collectively can fulfill all order items.

2.    (Original)  The method of claim 1, wherein said criteria include minimizing shipping costs for a customer that is to receive the order.

3.    (Original)  The method of claim 1, wherein said criteria include minimizing shipping costs for a middleman who received the order from a customer.

4.    (Original)  The methods of claim 1, wherein said criteria include minimizing shipping costs by minimizing the number of fulfillers used when splitting an order.

5.    (Currently Amended)  The method of claim 4, wherein said minimizing shipping costs comprises minimizing the cumulative shipping distances from said ~~multiple~~ fulfillers.

6.    (Original)  The method of claim 1, wherein the specified criteria include successively rotating the fulfillers in a round-robin manner to ensure fairness of selection of otherwise equally-qualified fulfillers.

7.    (Original)  The method of claim 1, further comprising:

automatically generating a fulfillment request based on how fulfillment has been assigned.

8.    (Currently Amended)  The method of claim 1, wherein a two-dimensional in-memory data structure is employed to indicate which <u>of said one or more</u> fulfillers can fulfill which types of <u>said individual order items</u> ~~products~~ that may be ordered.

9.    (Original)  The method of claim 8, wherein said two-dimensional data structure comprises a hash table.

10.    (Currently Amended)  A method <u>to be performed on a computing device</u> for providing improved fairness when assigning product orders to <u>one or more</u> ~~multiple~~ fulfillers, the method comprising:

receiving an order that requires fulfillment from one or more fulfillers, said order comprising individual order items;

determining desirable attributes for fulfilling the order among a set of available fulfillers;

ranking the set of fulfillers from most favorable to least favorable, based on said

desirable attributes;

if all of the order items of if the order can be fulfilled by a single fulfiller, assigning

the order to the most-favorable fulfiller that can fulfill all of the order items; and

if all of the order items of if the order cannot be fulfilled by a single fulfiller,

assigning the order to a subset comprising the most-favorable fulfillers that, collectively,

can fulfill all order items of the order.;

11.    (Original)  The method of claim 10, wherein said desirable attributes include

minimizing shipping costs for a customer that is to receive the order.

12.    (Original)  The method of claim 10, wherein said desirable attributes include

minimizing shipping costs for a middleman who received the order from a customer.

13.    (Original)  The methods of claim 10, wherein said desirable attributes include

minimizing shipping costs by minimizing the number of fulfillers used when splitting an

order.

14.    (Currently Amended)  The method of claim 13, wherein said minimizing shipping

costs comprises minimizing the cumulative shipping distances from said multiple

fulfillers.

15.    (Original)  The method of claim 10, wherein the desirable attributes include

successively favoring different fulfillers by rotating the fulfillers in a round-robin manner,

thereby ensuring fairness of selection of otherwise equally-qualified fulfillers.

16.    (Original)  The method of claim 10, further comprising:

automatically generating a fulfillment request based on how fulfillment has been assigned.

17.    (Currently Amended)  The method of claim 10, wherein a two-dimensional in-memory data structure is employed to indicate which fulfillers can fulfill which types of said individual order items ~~products~~ that may be ordered.

18.    (Currently Amended)  The method of claim 17 ~~18~~, wherein said two-dimensional data structure comprises a hash table.

19.    (Currently Amended)  The method of claim 18, wherein said two-dimensional data structure is extended into a three-dimensional data structure by having each entry of the hash table index, based on fulfiller/ order item ~~product type~~, into a bit vector indicating one or more order items for the order that may be fulfilled by that corresponding fulfiller shipping that corresponding order item ~~product type~~.

20.    (Original)  The method of claim 10, wherein each fulfiller is a selected one of a distributor, supplier, vendor, manufacturer, or service bureau.